

Frank Getlein:***Baby Out With Bath?***

There is apprehension and misapprehension about the forthcoming investigations of the CIA and the FBI that need a little clearing up.

The apprehension is that the baby will be thrown out with the bath water, the good we get from both agencies be limited, even ended, by efforts to investigate the bad.

The misapprehension is that somehow the two things — the good and the bad — are intimately tied up together, the services of intelligence, for instance, impossible to obtain without the surveillance of American citizens or the carrying on of covert operations against foreign governments with whom we are officially on friendly terms.

IN FACT the two things are quite different. It may be reasonably assumed that the bad — the surveillance and the covert hostilities — are often in conflict with the good — intelligence — and further, because that's the way the world runs, in such conflict the bad usually prevails.

The CIA's most famous fiasco, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, is also the most graphic example of the conflict. Clearly, before any such operation was mounted, there had to be some assurance, only obtainable through intelligence, that the Cuban people were so fed up with Castro that they were ready to rise up and join Howard Hunt's invasion force when it landed.

Equally obvious, no such assurance was possible, inasmuch as most of the anti-Castro Cubans had left the island. Nevertheless, the assurance was passed along and the rest is history, a dismal, shabby chapter.

IT DOES not take inside knowledge to realize that the assurance was passed along because the CIA was already committed to the invasion as part of its overall scheme of managing hemisphere affairs through violence. Clearly the covert operation had ill-served

what its responsible creator, Allen Dulles, once called "the craft of intelligence."

What is really at issue here and in numerous other examples is the basic democratic doctrine of Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." The corruption wrought by power on the wielders of power is not the kind that guides a cheap grafter like Spiro Agnew to accept bribes from Maryland contractors. That's just taking. The true corruption of power affects the vision and the reason.

The power of the CIA has consisted chiefly in its essential lack of accountability. The agency has had and maintains the power to bamboozle one president after another, one ironically named "oversight committee" after another. In exercising that power, the CIA has become profoundly corrupt, not in the Agnew sense, but in the loss of ability to see what is before it and to think straight about what it sees.

IN THIS, to be sure, the agency is but a model of the entire United States government throughout the long, devastating period of anti-Communism as foreign policy, a period still in progress. We could not see what was before us in Vietnam because we believed ourselves powerful enough not to have to see it. Our power created a series of false, hallucinatory visions, a series still in progress.

In this complex and often deceitful world, the United States does indeed need all the intelligence it can get and it needs some permanent organization for gathering that intelligence.

When we allow that organization to operate as a law unto itself, we ordain its blindness; when we allow it to mix operations with the gathering of intelligence, we command it to blind itself. The investigations will not imperil "the craft of intelligence." They offer our best hope for getting it back.